

St. Paul's Playbook (1 Corinthians 2:10b-16)

The first reading for our daily Mass lectionary began St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians last week. The letter reads like a collection of essays addressing problems in the church at Corinth.

Overall, the Corinthian church was quite a mess. In the letter, Paul presents a problem and then responds to the problem with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul presents the gospel as a lens or a set of glasses through which he thinks about every area of life. In the end, the Corinthians are not living what they say that they believe.

Some of the problems the church at Corinth faced included severe divisions, social snobbery between the rich and the poor, food sacrificed in pagan temples, abuses around the Lord's table, and some even denying fundamental doctrines like the Resurrection of Christ. Paul spent a year and a half in the city proclaiming the gospel. Without question, the city and the local church were *very challenging* for Paul.

Paul developed a rhetorical strategy to begin addressing these problems. After establishing his authority (he was called by Christ), Paul first reminds them of their high calling from Christ. He says that the Corinthian Christians are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy.*" In other words, he anchors their identity in God rather than their fractured social cliques. He reminds them that they are called to be saints.

Next, Paul reminds them of their spiritual gifts. All these gifts are just that, *gifts*. The Corinthian Christians do not need to boast of their accomplishments. All is a gift and any boasting should be in the Lord and what *He* has done for them.

Additionally, Paul reminds them of the gift of the Spirit of God that they have received. Paul contrasts God's hidden wisdom with human wisdom. The cross of Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's wisdom also calls wise the lowly and despised of the world in contrast to the wise by human standards.

This brings us to the verses for today's first reading. The Spirit of God, which the Corinthian Christians have received, gives them the ability to see and understand things from God's perspective. Paul contrasts the "spiritual person" (filled with God's Spirit) and the "natural person" (without God's Spirit).

The spiritual person, filled with God's Spirit, has access to the innermost life of God or as Paul says, "the mind of Christ." The natural person, on the other hand, sees things from a broken perspective. They look at things by the "wisdom of this age" and not from God's hidden mysterious wisdom.

In short, Paul is brilliant in the way he begins his first letter to the Corinthians. He begins positively by reminding them of their identity in God and what they *already share in Christ*. He attempts to undercut their competitive status-driven cliques. Paul gives them spiritual milk to help them grow from spiritual infants to mature disciples in Christ. Instead of pulling out his hair and yelling at them, he displays great patience and love as he works with them.

For our part, I am a *big fan* of St. Paul and the way he evangelizes. He is brilliant! He begins with identity and gifts shared (very positive!) before tackling each problem in the church at Corinth. After presenting each problem, he presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how it provides the path forward for correcting the problem. We could take a couple of pages out of St. Paul's playbook in our own efforts at bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. 😊

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!